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THE ORDER OF MILTON'S SONNETS

The traditional method of arranging Milton's sonnets has been to unite the groups given in the 1645 and 1673 editions of the *Minor Poems* with the four sonnets published by Phillips in 1694, and then to shift such of the twenty-four pieces as seem to be out of time order. The scheme thus offered by Professor Masson has stood for years essentially unchanged, in spite of single alterations proposed now and then by individual editors. Often taste has influenced such decisions. For satisfactory results it seems that all the internal evidence should be examined at once, and with it Milton's own directions in the Trinity College Manuscript; this document contains details concerning the order of the sonnets which seem never to have been used at full value.

In the 1645 volume, I, "O nightingale, that on yon bloomy spray,"¹ is followed by the five Italian sonnets,² and these in turn by VII, "How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of Youth." The group is completed by VIII, "When the Assault was Intended to y^e Citty";³ IX, "Lady, that in the prime of earliest youth"; and X, "To y^e Lady Margaret Ley."

Of this group, I-VI appear from imitative characteristics to be early work. The conventionality of the lines to the nightingale requires no comment. Quite as surely the Italian poems may be considered formal experiments. With the demonstrated reasons for this estimate of Milton's Italian poems⁴ should be considered the common characteristics of the English poems written at Cambridge during the early seventeenth century. Interesting parallelisms of

¹ First lines will be given of sonnets lacking titles in the first printed forms or in the Manuscript. Manuscript references are not according to Wright's "Facsimile of the Manuscript of Milton's Minor Poems," etc. (1899), wherein blank pages 10-12 and 51-54 have been ignored, but according to the numbering on alternate folios of the Manuscript itself.

² The "Canzone," printed between III and IV, is not numbered.

³ The MS forms (folio 9). Sonnet VIII was headed "On his Dore when y^e Citty expected an assault," but Milton altered the heading as put down by his amanuensis or copyist.

⁴ E. Alodolf, *Giovanni Milton e l'Italia* (1907), pp. 54-61.

conventional themes might be drawn from the writings of Milton, Crashaw, Vaughan, and others; in many instances Drummond of Hawthornden used the same subjects as these English contemporaries. Though this experiment would demonstrate nothing final concerning the dating of Sonnets I–VI, it would bring added power to the assertion that nothing signifies I to have been written at Horton, as has been assumed,¹ or II–VI to have been composed in Italy.

Less speculation is necessary regarding the four that follow. The subject of VII proves a date near December 9, 1631, the poet's twenty-third birthday. On similar grounds VIII may be assigned to the end of 1642, for Charles threatened London only on October 12 and November 12 of that year. Here the Manuscript corroborates the internal evidence by the marginal date "1642" opposite a draft of this sonnet.² Sonnets IX and X can also be dated broadly from their materials within the limits of the autumn of 1643 and midsummer, 1645. The lady addressed in IX would scarcely have gained such praise until after Mary Powell had returned to her parents, and for the same reason X, "To y^e Lady Margaret Ley," may be assigned to the months when Phillips asserted that Milton's friendship for Lady Margaret was at its strongest.³ Both pieces were surely ready for printing on October 6, 1645, the date of entry for Milton's first collection in the Stationers' Register.

The Manuscript confirms the arrangement of the last four sonnets given in the 1645 volume. On folio [6]⁴ is a draft of VII, without number but from its placing evidently written before the others. VIII, IX, and X fortunately stand on the same folio (9); they are in correct order (though not numbered) and the last two are in Milton's own hand. The date 1642 at the side of VIII implies that IX and X were written later, inasmuch as they follow it on the folio, and revisions in the texts of both prove that these two are not fair copies of other drafts. These points show that in his first printed

¹ In Moody's edition, 1900.

² Folio 9. Milton evidently struck out the date when changing the title as noted above.

³ *Letters of State written by Mr. John Milton, etc.* (1694), xxiii.

⁴ Arabic numerals for certain sonnets represent Manuscript forms. Wherever reference is made to unnumbered folios of the Manuscript, the correct number appears in brackets.

book Milton was careful to mark the order of his sonnets, and also that the agreement between the 1645 volume and the Manuscript is more than accidental. Proper deductions from other evidence of the same sort would be that the 1645 collection was carefully arranged throughout; that Sonnets I-VI and the "Canzone" are properly placed; and that these pieces, standing before the birthday sonnet, were written during Milton's years at Cambridge.

Fourteen sonnets remain to be arranged. Ten of these were first printed in the 1673 edition of the *Minor Poems*. Appearance before Milton's death has given this volume an authority not entirely justifiable, for some points of weakness show that it lacked the oversight granted the 1645 collection.

Folio [46] of the Manuscript has drafts of the two divorce sonnets, with the heading "These sonnets follow y^e 10 in y^e printed booke"; below this direction is the title "On the Detraccon which followed upon my writeing certaine treatises." They are numbered 11 and 12, "I do but prompt the age to quit their clogs" standing first. In the left margin, directly opposite the numeral 11, is the direction "vid. ante." This note, I believe, has a relation to the evident change of the numeral above the first piece from 12 to 11, for the change seems due to evidence on folio 43. There, in Milton's hand, is another draft of this sonnet, with the same title and number. To confirm this mark of the poet's intention that the two divorce sonnets should not be arranged as they are printed in the 1673 volume, there exists a second draft of Sonnet XII; it is to be found on folio 47, with its proper number, and is clearly a working draft. The title is not given.

Internal evidence points to a time basis for this arrangement. Sonnet XI shows a spirit of active conflict such as possessed Milton when issuing the enlarged version of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, etc., on February 2, 1644, and *The Judgement of Martin Bucer concerning Divorce*, etc., on August 6.¹ His expression "For all this waste of wealth and loss of blood" (l. 14) may conceivably refer to the greatest battle of the Civil War, fought at Marston Moor on July 2. There is also reason to consider the "barbarous noise" (l. 3) of Milton's assailants at least as late as midsummer,

¹ Thomason, *Catalog*, etc. (1908), I, 336.

1644; Thomason's list of pamphlets dates two of the noteworthy attacks¹ upon Milton's divorce doctrines in September and November, and the abusive references to him continuing to appear for two years more would have had less effect upon him than the early censure. Consequently, I place XI in the fall of 1644² because of its tone in contrast with the lines on "Tetrachordon." This pamphlet was published on March 4, 1645; the mild sonnet referring to it necessarily appeared later. Mistress Milton's return to London in August or September may be taken to mark the latest date for Sonnet XII; moreover, its whimsical tone implies that it was written much later than the one reviling Milton's adversaries. Such materials within the two poems bear out the Manuscript evidence of arrangement, so that it seems proper to reverse the order of the 1673 edition.

All three drafts of the lines "To Mr. H. Lawes on His Aires"³ are numbered 13, and at the right of the first, rough draft is the date February 9, 1645—that is, 1646. This exact notation of date, in Milton's own hand, is very valuable proof of care for a time order, inasmuch as the next folio, [44], bears Sonnet XIV with an equally exact date heading. At the head of the sheet Milton wrote, "On y^e religious memorie of M^{rs} Catherine Thomson my christian freind deceas'd 16 Decem. 1646." Below is the working draft, the number 14, and then the fair copy. Both XIII and XIV are wholly in the poet's own handwriting, as are the headings and dates.

Yet the surest evidence of thoughtful arrangement in the Manuscript is on folios 47 and [48]. The former has the draft of the divorce sonnet referred to above; then, "15 On y^e Lord Gen. Fairfax at y^e

¹ Prynne's *Twelve Considerable Questions*, etc., was issued on September 16 (I, 341), and the anonymous *Answer to a Book intituled the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* on November 19 (I, 349). Thomason's catalogue gives no earlier dates bearing on the matter.

² The only inexplicable detail of the Manuscript is opposed to this date, inasmuch as the draft of XI on folio 43 is below the working draft of 13, dated February 9, 1645 (i.e., 1646). Possible explanation depends upon the belief that this draft of XI is from an earlier copy.

³ Folio 43 bears two drafts, the first headed, "To my freind M^r Hen. Laws. Feb. 9, 1645"; the second, "To M^r Hen: Laws on the publishing of his Aires." The third, on folio 45, has the heading given above. In this case the copyist wrote the words "the publishing of" and then struck them out. This fact disposes of the labored arguments against a date of composition so long before the publication of Lawes's songs; the delay had made Milton's early form of the title inappropriate.

seige of Colchester";¹ and finally, "16 To the Lord Generall Cromwell May 1652. On the proposalls of certaine ministers at y^e Commtee for Propogation of the Gospell." In the left margin, opposite the numeral 15, is Milton's note, "on y^e forcers of Conscience to come in heer." To this the copyist added, "turn over the leafe," and on folio [48] wrote opposite the poem named, "To come in as directed in the leafe before." This last note has been deleted but is legible.

It will be recalled that Sonnet XIV was concerned with an event of December 16, 1646. In XV the line to Fairfax,

Thy firm unshaken virtue ever brings
Victory home ,

implies a date near August 25, 1648, when the siege of Colchester was raised. If earlier, under Milton's title the writing could not have been begun before June 13, the first day of the action. Under such conditions was there reason to insert "On the Forcers of Conscience" between these two sonnets? Was it written between December 16, 1646, and the summer of 1648?

The very abundance of internal evidence in this case is deceptive. The references are less exact than they seem at first sight. Masson assumed that the spirit of this sonnet suited best the early months of 1646, when Milton had "done forever with Presbyterianism"² and had taken a defiant attitude toward Parliament. But many events during these years might easily have driven him to abuse the Presbyterians. Bitter disputes between Prynne, Godwin, and Robinson began in 1644, and a year later the pamphleteers were taking sides with either the Presbyterians or independent factions in the House of Commons. In June, 1645, and again in the following March the Westminster Assembly invited such abuse by asserting its authority in questions of orthodoxy. So much for the general incitements toward such an attack.

A point overlooked is that Milton's sonnet has a defiant, threatening tone that shows full belief in the evil outcome of the conflict. "On the Forcers of Conscience" confesses defeat as the individualists were experiencing it toward the close of 1646, when Parliament passed the ordinances for reducing all England to strict Presbyterian conformity.

¹ This title has been deleted.

² III, 471.

The abolishment of Episcopacy had been assured at the forming of the Westminster Assembly in 1643, but the first specific action of Parliament was their ordinance of January, 1645, for the general adoption of the Directory for Public Worship in place of the Book of Common Prayer. This ordinance was strengthened in August and during the succeeding twelvemonth by further legislation. Not, however, until August 28, 1646, did the Houses draw up the rules of ordination by the Classical Presbyteries—the chief cause of Milton's indignation. On October 9 they abolished the places of all archbishops and bishops within the kingdom, and from November 17, 1646, to March 5, 1647, passed successive acts for confiscation of church properties to the Commonwealth.¹

From the very definite nature of Milton's advice to the Presbyterian forces in Parliament and to their agent, the Westminster Assembly, the sonnet "On the Forcers of Conscience" could not have been written until after August 28, 1646; moreover, the circumstances inviting such indignant expressions from an independent religionist continued until the following summer. Political Presbyterianism weakened slowly, but the ferment of dissatisfaction among army leaders was growing steadily throughout the first half of 1647. Thus, while Parliament was working upon Charles I for such proposals as came on May 12 in his long-deferred "Answer to the Nineteen Propositions," offering to establish Presbyterianism for a test period of three years, the political organization of the army was taking form. Upon such data it seems right to place this sonnet within the period beginning on August 28, 1646, and ending with the capture of the king by the army on June 4, 1647. On the latter day was ended the long uncertainty over questions of religious toleration which had become vital through the ordinances of the preceding ten months, and only then could Milton have felt the relief of his fellow-independents.

It has been shown that events do not prohibit a placing of this political sonnet in accordance with the Manuscript directions on the margin of folio 47. I therefore assume XIV, "On the Religious Memory of Mrs. Catherine Thomson," to have been written soon

¹ C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait, *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660* (1911), I, 887-924.

after December 16, 1646; [XV],¹ "On the Forcers of Conscience," during the early months of 1647; [XVI], on Fairfax, about August 25, 1648; and [XVII], on Cromwell, in May, 1652.

On folio [48] appears the last sonnet in this unbroken sequence in the Trinity College Manuscript—the lines "To S^r Henry Vane the younger," with the number 17. George Sikes,² who first printed the poem, in 1662, corroborates the Manuscript order with the note: "Composed by a Learned Gentleman, and sent him, July 3, 1652." In the corrected scheme the Vane sonnet is [XVIII].

From this point the 1673 edition of the *Minor Poems* must be relied upon for a central basis of arrangement. The sequence given there is as follows: "On the Late Massacher in Piemont"; "When I consider how my light is spent"; "Lawrence, of virtuous father virtuous son"; "Cyriack, whose grandsire on the royal bench"; and "Methought I saw my late espoused saint." "On the Forcers of Conscience" is not printed with the sonnet group, but farther on in the 1673 volume. It remains, therefore, to place this sonnet properly according to the Manuscript data and also to add the four omitted from that volume for political reasons.

Sonnet [XIX], "On the Late Massacher in Piemont," may be given a loose dating within the limits of May, 1655, and March, 1656. For nearly a year after the massacre the *State Papers* reflect the lively interest of Englishmen in giving aid to the Piedmontese,³ but thereafter the entries are perfunctory records of funds on hand and collections. Entries between May 17 and June 1 are of a petition to London citizens for aid, of a committee for relief, of a set day for public humiliation and appeal to the churches, and of a house-to-house canvass for funds. If these entries show the spirit of London in the spring of 1655, conditions were favorable for such a composition as Milton's sonnet on these Protestant martyrs, particularly by one so closely associated with Cromwell. Moreover, his state letters regarding the Piedmontese show an indignation similar to that of the sonnet. On such grounds I date [XIX] soon after the event inspiring it—in May or June, 1655.

¹ From this point brackets indicate my revisions of the old numbering in Roman numerals as given in the 1673 edition.

² *The Life and Death of Sir Henry Vane*, pp. 93-94; from J. K. Hosmer's *The Life and Death of Young Sir Henry Vane* (1888), p. 376.

³ *State Papers, Domestic*, cxxvii, 165-97.

The position of Sonnets [XX] and [XXI] in the 1673 volume may imply much or little. [XX], "When I consider how my light is spent," may have been written at any time after the spring of 1652, when Milton's blindness became complete. [XXI], "Lawrence, of virtuous father virtuous son," likewise has no certain date; we know only that a son of Henry Lawrence, President of Cromwell's council, was intended, and that from 1652 to 1660 Milton's relationship with this youth was most cordial.¹

With the first sonnet to Skinner the Manuscript again becomes useful. Folio 49 has the last ten lines of "Cyriack, whose grandsire on the royal bench," and then the companion piece, with the number 22. Evidently this sheet and another, both smaller than the body of the Manuscript,² belonged to a collection of the sonnets including those on Fairfax, Cromwell, and Vane, but not that on the Long Parliament. Both sheets bear pieces excluded from the 1673 volume, a fact that may explain their preservation in this Manuscript. They were inserted in time to be paged properly, so that the number 22 on the second Skinner sonnet may be considered a contemporary placing of the poem. In the present revision these two sonnets stand [XXII] and [XXIII], in the same order, but from no positive evidence of date.³ The entire series is made complete by adding Sonnet [XXIV], "Methought I saw my late espoused saint." This could not have been written before the death of his second wife, Catherine, on February 3, 1658.⁴ Once more the Manuscript supplies a numbered draft to prove that Milton's sonnets originally were arranged with conscious care,⁵ and as in all previous instances this poem has a position that conforms with the known facts regarding the relative time of its composition.

A few general inferences may be drawn from these proofs of a time basis of arrangement. First, the Trinity College Manuscript

¹ A mention of Lawrence in the "Second Defence" (1654) is too casual to have value. Phillips' life is again the only source of information. See the *Letters of State*, etc. (1694), xxxvii.

² Those forming folios 45, [46], 49, and [50]. The numbering of sonnets on 45 and [46] proves that that sheet was bound in by the wrong edge.

³ Internal evidence in [XXIII] indicates 1655 as the time of writing, "this three years' day" being dated from the spring of 1652.

⁴ Brit. Mus. *Add. MS.* 32, 310.

⁵ Folio 50: number 23.

and the 1645 edition of the *Minor Poems* gain new authority. Their interrelation shows that Humphrey Moseley wrote truly in announcing his book as from Milton's true copies, and that undoubtedly their author gave personal supervision to the first printing of his poems. Furthermore, proved disagreement between the Manuscript and the 1673 edition lessens the importance of a text already known to have been carelessly revised during the printing process. Finally, from the exactness of Milton's autograph notes regarding the time order of his early pieces, according to present information Sonnets I-VI should be placed as in the 1645 volume, with the assumption that they were written at Cambridge as literary exercises in the fashion of the day.

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